

Ten Were Cleansed, One Was Saved: The Faith That Makes Us Well

A message from Luke 17:11–19

Reed S. Rusniak

Text: Luke 17:11–19

*On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” When he saw them he said to them, **“Go and show yourselves to the priests.”** And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, **“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”** And he said to him, **“Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”** (ESV)*

Every one of us knows what it means to receive a kindness and forget to say thank you. A neighbor helps us move a piece of furniture, a coworker covers our shift, a stranger holds a door in the rain, and within the hour, the moment has slipped our mind entirely. Gratitude, it seems, does not come naturally to the human heart. What comes naturally is relief, followed quickly by moving on.

The passage before us today puts that tendency on full display, and it does so through one of the most remarkable healing accounts in all the Gospels. Ten men are healed of a disease that had stolen their homes, their families, and their standing in the community. Only one comes back to say thank you. Of that one, Jesus asks a haunting question: **“Where are the nine?”**

This account gives us far more than a lesson in manners. Luke has placed it here to show us something about the nature of saving faith, what it looks like, how it behaves, and what it ultimately receives. **Ten men were healed that day. Jesus tells us only one was saved.**

From this account, we will see three things about the faith that truly makes us well:

It cries out before it sees any change.

It obeys before it understands the outcome.

It turns back to give thanks because gratitude, not just healing, is the mark of true faith.

First: Faith Cries Out for Mercy Before It Sees Any Change (vv. 11–13)

Notice where Jesus found these men. Verse 12 tells us they stood at a distance, a detail easy to skip past but important to consider. Leprosy in that world meant expulsion. The Law required these men to live outside the camp, to warn others away from themselves, to announce their own uncleanness to anyone who came near. They had lost their homes, their trades, their families,

their place in the community of God's people. Ten men, strangers to one another in ordinary life, had been thrown together by a shared misery.

From that distance, unable to come any closer, they **lifted up their voices. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."** Notice what they **did not say**. They did not ask Him to explain their suffering. They did not ask for an argument about fairness. They asked for mercy, and they asked before anything at all had changed in their condition.

This is the first mark of true faith. It cries out to Christ while still in the condition that needs Him. It does not wait for the disease or the sin to loosen its grip before it speaks. It does not wait until things feel more hopeful. Faith calls out to Jesus from the distance, from the leprosy, from the mess, precisely because it has nowhere else to turn.

Many of us have convinced ourselves that we need to clean ourselves up before we come to Christ, that our prayers only count once our lives look a little more presentable. The ten lepers show us the opposite. They came exactly as they were, unclean, desperate, and at a distance, and they cried out anyway. **That is where faith always begins, not after the change, but before it, when we have nothing to offer God except our need.**

We see the same pattern in the account of blind Bartimaeus, sitting by the roadside outside Jericho. When he heard that Jesus was passing by, he began to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many in the crowd rebuked him and told him to be quiet. His eyes had not been opened. Nothing about his circumstances had changed. Yet Mark tells us that he cried out all the more, not less, the louder the crowd told him to be silent.

In that account of the blind man, notice that the rebuke of the crowd did not silence his faith. It emboldened it. A blind beggar and ten men covered in sores had nothing in common by circumstance, yet everything in common by faith.

Both cried out before there was any evidence that their prayer would be heard. Both were told, in one way or another, to be quiet and wait. Neither one waited. That is what faith does when it is real. It refuses to let silence, shame, or the discouragement of others keep it from calling on the name of Christ.

Second: Faith Obeys the Word Before It Understands the Outcome (v. 14)

Look now at verse 14. Jesus does not touch these men. He does not pronounce them clean on the spot. Instead, He gives them an instruction that, on its face, makes no sense at all. "Go and show yourselves to the priests."

Under the Law of God, a man went to the priest after he had already been healed, so the priest could examine him and certify that he was fit to rejoin the community. Jesus tells these ten men to go to the priest while they are still covered in sores. Nothing about their bodies has changed. **He is asking them to obey a command before there is any visible reason to obey it.**

Luke tells us exactly what happened next. **“And as they went, they were cleansed.”** Not before they went. Not while they stood arguing about whether the instruction made sense. The cleansing came in the act of going. Their obedience and their healing were so tightly bound that Luke can hardly separate them in a single sentence.

This is the second mark of true faith. It obeys the Word of Christ before it can see how that obedience will turn out. Faith does not require a full explanation before it moves. If those ten men had stood at that distance, debating the logic of the command and reasoning that it made no sense to visit a priest with leprosy still open on their skin, they would have remained leprous forever. Their healing was found only on the road, in the act of obeying an instruction that had not yet been justified by results.

This is exactly the lesson God taught a Syrian general named Naaman centuries earlier. Naaman came to the prophet Elisha seeking a cure for his own leprosy, expecting some dramatic ceremony, the prophet coming out to meet him, calling on the name of the Lord, waving his hand over the disease. Instead, Elisha sent a simple message through a servant. “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.”

Naaman was furious. The instruction made no sense to him. The rivers of his own homeland seemed better suited to the task than the muddy Jordan. He very nearly walked away in his rage, and if he had, he would have carried his leprosy home with him. It was only when his servants reasoned with him, asking why he would refuse so simple a command when he would gladly have attempted something difficult, that he humbled himself, went down to the river, and dipped himself seven times exactly as he had been told. Scripture records that his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child.

Naaman’s cleansing did not come from the water of the Jordan. It came from his obedience to a word he did not understand and would never have chosen on his own. The ten lepers were healed the same way generations later, cleansed on the road, in the act of walking toward priests who would find nothing wrong with them yet. In both accounts, the healing was hidden inside the obedience, invisible until the command had already been followed.

Third: Faith Turns Back to Give Thanks, and Only That Faith Saves (vv. 15–19)

Now, we come to the heart of the passage, verses 15 through 19. All ten were cleansed. Only one, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice, and fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving Him thanks. Luke adds a quiet, pointed detail. “Now he was a Samaritan,” a man from a people the Jews of that day considered heretics and half-breeds, an outsider that they wanted nothing to do with.

Jesus’ response cuts straight to the point. **“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?”** Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? Nine men received exactly the same physical miracle as the tenth. Their skin was made new. Their families could welcome

them home. Yet only one of the ten receives the words Jesus speaks next: **“Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”**

Here is a distinction we must not miss. The Greek word behind “made you well” is the same word elsewhere translated as **“saved.”** All ten were healed of leprosy. Only one was saved. The nine walked away with new skin and unchanged hearts. The Samaritan walked away with new skin and a heart that had been turned toward God. His healing led him to worship. Theirs, it seems, led only to relief, and relief, once satisfied, asks no more questions and offers no more thanks.

This is the third and deepest mark of true faith. It does not stop at the gift. It turns back to the Giver. Gratitude is not a nice addition to faith that we may take or leave depending on our personality. It is the evidence that faith was ever really there. A faith that receives every blessing God gives and never turns back to thank Him has reason to ask whether it was faith at all, or simply relief wearing faith’s clothing for a season.

I once knew of two men who received the same devastating diagnosis within months of each other, and both, against real odds, recovered. The first returned to exactly the life he had lived before, the same habits, the same self-reliance, the same silence toward God, as though nothing worth remembering had happened to him at all. Ask him about it today, and he will call it luck, or good doctors, or simply his own strong constitution.

The second could not stop speaking of it. He rearranged his schedule around his relationship with the Lord, gave generously out of a gratitude he could hardly explain, and told anyone who would listen that his life no longer belonged to him. He gladly proclaimed love for his Lord and Savior. Both men received the same mercy, but only one of them was truly changed by it.

That is the difference between the nine and the one. Both received a gift from the same hand. Only one recognized whose hand it was and returned to fall at His feet. The other nine are not villains in this story. They are simply what most of us default to whenever we are not careful, recipients of mercy who forget the goodness of God.

This is why the return matters so much. The Samaritan did not merely feel grateful in his heart while walking on toward the priests with the other nine. He turned around. He interrupted his own errand, an errand Jesus Himself had commanded, in order to go back and worship the One who had healed him. Faith is willing to lose a little time, a little convenience, even the appearance of finishing what it was told to do, for the sake of falling at the feet of Christ. The nine were technically obedient. Only the tenth was thankful, and it was the tenth, not the other nine, whom Jesus called saved.

Conclusion

Our passage has three important truths that we have considered. Each one gives us a look at true faith.

Faith cries out for mercy before it sees any change in its condition.

Faith obeys the Word of Christ before it can see how that obedience will turn out.

Faith turns back to give thanks, because gratitude is the evidence that faith was ever really there.

Ten men left that village healed, but only one left it saved. The question this text presses on each of us is not whether we have ever received mercy from God's hand. Every one of us has, more times than we could count. **The question is whether we have ever turned back.**

Perhaps you cried out to God once, in a hospital room, in a crisis, in a season you thought might undo you, and He answered. Perhaps life has since returned to normal, and somewhere along the way, without ever intending to, you became one of the nine. Do not let the relief you received become the reason you never returned to give thanks. Do not settle for being healed when Christ is offering to make you whole.

Wherever you are today, whatever mercy you have already received from His hand, He is still calling you back, not merely to notice what He has done, but to fall at His feet because of who He is. **"Rise and go your way, He says, your faith has made you well."**

In Summary

- 1) Faith Cries Out for Mercy Before It Sees Any Change
- 2) Faith Obeys the Word of Christ Before It Understands the Outcome
- 3) Faith Turns Back to Give Thanks, Because Only That Faith Saves

My friend, that is the message of Luke 17.

Ten were healed. One was saved. May none of us be found among the nine.

Prayer